Teen And Up Audiences

No Archive Warnings Apply

F/M
Gen

How to Train Your Dragon (Animated Movies)
DreamWorks Dragons (Cartoon)

Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III & Hiccup's Dragon Riders
Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III/Astrid Hofferson
Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III & Toothless
Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III & Astrid Hofferson

Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III
Toothless (How to Train Your Dragon)
Astrid Hofferson
Fishlegs Ingerman
Snotlout Jorgenson
Ruffnut Thorston
Tuffnut Thorston

Stubborn Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III
is it possible to forcibly erase a phobia?
hiccup sure thinks so
Dragons: Race to the Edge
Episode: s04e06 Dire Straits (Dragons: Race to the Edge)
Team Dynamics
Drowning
Team as Family
the riders aren't having any of hiccup's bullshit
Protective Astrid Hofferson
Dragon's Edge (How to Train Your Dragon)
how to train your hiccup
English

under pressure

cracklin_haze

Summary:

Well, that’s just great. On top of everything else Hiccup's got going for him, he can now add afraid of the ocean to the list.

or

After almost drowning in the Straits of Baldur, Hiccup devises a plan to get over his new ocean-induced anxiety. His team is unimpressed.

Notes:

uh oh, another one?? guys, i swear, i didn't plan to write another hiccup one-shot so quickly after posting the last one. i'm just thinking about him nonstop apparently.

cw: drowning, ill-advised methods of getting of fear of said drowning

these guys are idiots, but they're idiots who care about each other, so that's gotta count for something, right?

(See the end of the work for more notes (#work_endnotes).)

The first thing he's aware of are the deep, scratching coughs threatening to tear his lungs to shreds.

Hiccup coughs and coughs and *good Thor he cannot stop coughing.* His lips are wet from each hack—with both salt water and spit. A wad of mucus dislodges. Just when he's starting to think he might pass out again, someone slaps him firmly on the back, and he inhales.

"Breathe, Hiccup, just breathe."

Okay, if it were that easy, he would be doing it.

He splutters, forcing his vision to focus. The pressure in his head is overwhelming, muffling out most everything other than the blood pulsing there. His ears ache. His throat burns. His chest still feels like it's being crushed under the weight of a Boulder Class dragon.

"We need to get him out of these clothes," he hears a voice say. *"It will keep his body temperature from dropping even more."*

"Yeah, Fishface, I think we should focus on getting him oxygen first, don't you?"

Hiccup leans forward, doubling over. He tries to give a thumbs up to the Riders, but finds his hands are shaking too much to comply.

The first face he truly focuses on is Astrid's. She's kneeling beside him on the deck of the ship, eyes wide: there's a tinge of manic lacing the usual Hofferson crisis-situation determination. He reaches for her hand instinctively, and she practically drapes herself on his shoulder. She's warm.

Ruff and Tuff aren't far away, either, not a wisecrack in sight. Fishlegs looks downright stricken, and even Snotlout seems unnerved. Okay, so his team is looking rough—probably on account of him almost dying. Whoops.

Hiccup tries to get to his feet, and Astrid and Fishlegs catch him before he tumbles back down to the deck. Every swallow cuts like glass.

"What… happened?" *Did the winch fail? Did the chain break? Were my designs flawed?*

He manages to free himself from Fishlegs and Astrid, trying to show his team that their leader is fine; he's up and moving and *shit, he's falling again.*

Toothless dives, nudging him upright.

"Viggo happened." Snotlout says it like a curse.

"Viggo." Of course, of course it's Viggo. It's always Viggo. "No, no, he can't—" *gasp,* "—escape."

Hiccup tries to claw his way onto Toothless and fails miserably. Fishlegs has him around the middle, his dragon supporting from the side. Drowning *and* humiliation in one afternoon? No, no, not for Hiccup—doesn't sound like him at all.

"Easy, Hiccup. I got ya." Fishlegs gives him a reassuring squeeze. He's pretty sure it just makes his teeth chatter harder.

"Don't worry." Astrid looks like she wants to smash someone's face in with her axe even more than usual, now mounted up on Stormfly.

On the contrary, Hiccup wants to say. *I'm very, very worried. And cold. Did I mention that I'm cold? No?*

As the rest of his team flies off to deal with the fleeing scum of a man, Hiccup sags against Fishlegs with another weak round of coughing. He wants to believe that they can handle it, but he's got a sneaking suspicion Viggo has one-upped them this time.

And yes, the Riders return shortly—empty-handed. Viggo is apparently using dragons as a shield again, hiding behind them, knowing Hiccup will refuse to have his team fire. It's maddening, and it's a tactic that works, and that's even *more* maddening.

"We can try to draw them off course," Astrid offers. "We might be able to get a clearer shot if we—"

"No." Hiccup's throat aches. "That's enough for today. Riders, mount up. We'll lift the boat out the same way we came in—"

"The Straits are safe now," Astrid interrupts. "We're going to sail out. Fishlegs, you stay on the steerboard. We'll have riders in the air to keep lookout. Twins and I will take the first patrol."

"Astrid." Hiccup frowns.

She ignores him. "Snotlout, have Hookfang keep Hiccup warm."

"Sure, keep him warm," Snotlout mutters. *"Fuck the rest of us, am I right?"* It earns him a death glare from Astrid.

Hiccup really wants to protest, to lecture Astrid about overwriting his leadership, but when Hookfang stomps over to him and flares his body temperature, he really can't find it in himself to do anything other than huddle against him for a while. Man, dragons are awesome.

He sort of wishes they were headed back to the Edge instead of Berk, which is a horrible thought. Berk is their home—his people. He owes it to them to deliver the news that the trade channels have been restored and help unload the new shipments when they dock. He needs to stand beside his father and show them that Hiccup Haddock is worthy of becoming their next chief.

Which is what I want. Totally. Definitely that.

No matter how nice it would be to reflect and assess the afternoon's events in the peace and quiet of his own hut, he has to think about Berk first.

And now that Astrid has grounded him from the flight home, definitely on purpose, he has nothing but time to think. And think. And think some more . By the time she comes to check on him, he's thoroughly clouded by the torrent.

He should've been quicker to figure out the re-enforced Deathsong amber. If he'd triple-layered it the first time, he would've had more time to plan for an inevitable Viggo interruption. Did he seriously think there wouldn't be one? Is he new at this?

"Not freezing to death over there, are you, Haddock?" Astrid lands Stormfly on the deck, surveying him. In the fading light, she looks quite regal. Grown-up.

Hiccup stays leaning against Hookfang's warm, scaly hide, giving him a few well-placed scritches. The dragon rumbles his approval. "Not yet. Devastating, I know. Someone has to break the news to Snotlout."

"Not funny."

"Kinda funny."

Astrid glares at him. "Just… don't die, okay?"

"Trying my very best," he assures her. "Oh, hey, Astrid, when we get back to Berk, could you maybe… not fill my dad in on the finer details? The, uh, super-duper close to drowning parts? You don't gotta lie, but you know how he is. He worries about me."

"Sure, Hiccup." She seems to maybe want to say more, but sighs and takes to the sky.

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Hiccup suspects that he'll have some sort of lingering reaction to the ocean after the Straits of Baldur incident, but it's not until a few days later, when he and Toothless are flying a very routine route, that he confirms his suspicions.

Toothless dips low, gliding at an angle. It's a move they've done a hundred times before, and this isn't even as close to the water as they usually get, but the spray on his face still turns his knuckles white.

Seeming to sense his unusual tension, Toothless barks out a question, and Hiccup pats him comfortingly. "No big deal, bud, I just—"

A wave crashes into the base of a nearby Seastack and sends a deep, sharp pain through his chest.

"Toothless, up."

He pushes his dragon higher into the sky, clinging to him as they circle back around towards the island—landing on a rocky ledge. He unhooks himself from the stirrups, jumping back onto solid ground to catch his breath.

"Alright, so, maybe a big deal." Hiccup stares out at the sea. The sun is starting to dip towards the horizon. The water isn't particularly choppy today. It should've been a peaceful evening ride.

Well, that's just great. On top of everything else he's got going for him, he can now add *afraid of the ocean* to the list.

This isn't even the first time he's come close to drowning: he'd nearly been drowned by Dagur when they were kids, while trying to free Toothless from the Hooligan ships at the Red Death nest, during the whole stunt with the lightning rod, that time with Snotlout, that other time with Snotlout—

"What gives?" Hiccup shakes himself a little, as if that alone can snap him out of it. "This is the final straw, huh? This time did us in? Oh, you know, old six-shot Hiccup! Drown him five times, no big deal. Try and do it a sixth? Odin, you got him now."

Toothless nudges under his hand, and Hiccup lets him—outburst fading. He's already starting to formulate a plan: *Get Hiccup Over His Very Sudden and Very Stupid New Fear of the Ocean.*

It just rolls right off the tongue.

Hiccup waits until they're back on the Edge to enact the first step. He's mapped it out, and it makes sense on paper, but as he's so brutally learned recently, a good paper plan doesn't always translate to a good practice plan. If it did, he wouldn't be having to make this dumb plan in the first place.

Any time not spent going over the Rider's next move in the Viggo conflict, he dedicates to piecing together a water-tight metal basin in his hut. The others notice his fixation, of course, but don't question it, instead mumbling the usual *when Hiccup's got a project, he always disappears.*

It's okay, though. He's doing this for them, too. A leader with this glaring of a weak spot—and trust him, he's got a lot of weak spots to compare it to—puts them all at risk.

A few days later, and the basin is complete, which means it's time to enact the next step.

Leaving the dim glow of the forge for the first time all day, he steps out onto the deck of his hut and scans the rest of the Edge.

The sun is starting to go down, casting purple and gold hues across the whole place. A few wild dragons soar overhead, probably looking for a nice spot to bed down for the evening. There's laughter coming from the dome, along with the telltale sounds of splashing. The others must be washing their dragons; it usually turns into quite the production—the perfect way to spend a sunny evening.

Hiccup wishes he were down there, too.

The sun disappears, last dregs of light fading to shadow. He watches Snotlout and Tuff wrestle all the way back to their huts, trading off headlocks and shouting nonsense. Astrid and Ruff are both soaking wet, and he figures it's likely the fault of two guys now trying to get the other in a perfect Bezerker hold. And yes, sure enough, the girls have buckets of water—chasing Tuff and Snotlout .

"Guys, this is a very poor use of our fresh water," Fishlegs is shouting.

"Beg to differ!" Astrid knocks Snotlout's hat off his heat, sending it clanging down several wooden stairs. *"This is the best use of our fresh water. Look at his face! Aw, what's wrong, Jorgenson? Are your pants all wet? Not so funny on the receiving end, is it?"*

Toothless, woken from a nap by all the noise, joins Hiccup on the deck.

"They're a bunch of idiots, aren't they?" Hiccup rubs his dragon affectionately—and finds that he means the words affectionately, too. "We should grab those buckets when they put them down. We've got a basin to fill."

Hiccup doesn't say *put them away* because he knows there's no way they're going to do that. They'll likely just abandon them on the stairs somewhere, wait for an unsuspecting person—probably Tuff—to trip and then laugh about it.

When the rest of the Riders finally turn in for the evening, Hiccup spends an hour ferrying buckets of sea water back to his hut. The basin is deep enough for bathing, but not much else. He'll have to actively try to go under.

It's a first step, after all—an incremental introduction. It's exactly what he would do if he were working with a skittish dragon.

Once the basin is filled, sea water sloshing over the sides a bit from the final bucket dump, Hiccup plants himself at the edge and stares down into the dented bottom. It distorts with the ripples.

"Ah, this is gonna suck so bad."

Toothless is pacing, agitated by what Hiccup intends to do.

"Okay, okay, just gettin' it over with," Hiccup mutters to himself. He strips down to his undermost layers. Eventually, he'll have to get comfortable doing this with the clothes on—extra weight, restrictive movements, and all that—but this is step one. Taking it slow.

The water is cold around his ankle, and it takes all of his will power to lower himself into the basin properly: hands braced on the sides, knee bent.

Toothless warbles again.

"Yeah, you and me both." Hiccup breathes out—puffing his cheeks. "Alright, counting. Going down on three, bud. One. Two."

Fuck, oh fuck, why am I doing this?

"Three."

Hiccup takes one last breath and pushes himself down under the water. The icy chill isn't the only reason his chest freezes up, but it certainly doesn't help. Water rushes against his ears, muffling all other sounds.

The diving bell groans as the pressure threatens to crack it— *no, the basin.* He's not in the ocean. He's in a basin. He's just in the basin, in his hut. He's fine.

Hiccup doesn't make it all the way to his intended submerged time. He taps out at around thirty seconds, as the burning sensation in his lungs grows stronger—the familiar, slicing panic with it.

He bursts up, coughing, just like he had on the deck of the ship in the Straits. He's panting, breath coming in fast, shallow gasps. Okay, so that's not great, but he went under, didn't he? Bodes well.

Hiccup pushes himself up and out of the basin, stumbling forward. Toothless catches him instantly, licking his face and curling himself around Hiccup.

“Test one,” Hiccup mutters. He lets himself rest in Toothless’ protective circle for a few moments, then ducks under the tail to make for his workbench.

Using a charcoal pencil, he jots a few notes. Water from his hair drips into his eyes, and he brushes it away before it can fall onto the paper.

“First reintroduction: full submerge. Under target at around thirty seconds. Hmm. Maybe I should’ve started with partial submergence. What do you think, bud?”

Toothless narrows his eyes, unhappy with all of it.

“Well, that’s not an option.” Hiccup turns back to the paper. “I gotta do this a couple more times tonight. Let’s adjust half of them to be a partial submerge. We’re making good progress. I can feel it.”

He can only make himself do two more submerges before the shaking becomes too bad to push through, and he’s forced to call off the rest of the testing for the night. He climbs into bed, still trembling.

“Ah, don’t give me that face,” Hiccup tells his dragon as he huddles under the blanket and furs. “I’ll get it. This is gonna work.”

He dreams of the deep ocean, of staring up at the surface and hearing his friends laugh, of sinking deeper and deeper until he can no longer hear them.

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“What the fuck is that?”

Hiccup jumps, nearly falling off his workbench and sending several papers fluttering to the ground. He hadn’t heard Snotlout approach. The afternoon is nice, and he has his hut hatch propped open. Sue him for wanting to facilitate a cross-breeze.

“What’s what?” Hiccup plays dumb.

“Oh, just the suspicious giant hidden object in the center of your hut.” Snotlout crosses his arms. “Is it a weapon?”

“It’s nothing.”

“Doesn’t look like nothing. And hey, what’s with all the buckets in here? Astrid was just yelling at me this morning because she thinks *I’m* the reason they’re missing, when clearly the twins are way more likely to be at fault—”

“Oh, great.” Hiccup stands, hoping to walk his cousin out of his hut and get his attention focused on something else. He grabs several buckets, pushing them into his hands. “Thanks for volunteering to take them back to Astrid.”

“I didn’t—”

“Gotta work, super busy, bye.” Hiccup pushes Snotlout out onto the deck, then shuts the hatch. He lets out a heavy sigh.

The buckets aren’t necessary anymore—neither is the basin, really. He’ll probably scrap it for parts unless he feels like having a private, really cold bathing tub instead of the insulated rock springs that Fishlegs built for them all to use. He’s been at the whole desensitization basin thing for several nights now, and it’s taking longer than he would like. If he had all the time in the world, he would stay at it for a few days more, but the next step is calling his name.

It’ll probably be fine. Accelerated timeline, and all that.

Hiccup actually shows up to dinner on time that night, and he knows because Tuffnut immediately greets him with *wow, you actually showed up to dinner on time tonight.*

“Ha, ha, hilarious.” Hiccup slides into his seat around the circle, poking at the meal. He misses Heather’s cooking; Tuff and Ruff always oversalt their meal nights. “Look how hard I’m laughing.”

“I’m looking,” Tuff squints. “But I’m not finding. Sister Nut, is he perchance poking fun at our elevated sense of humor?”

“On the contrary, Brother Nut.” Ruffnut instantly joins the bit because of course she does. “I fear he’s forgotten how to laugh with joy and revel in glee. Truly, a tragedy.”

While the twins pretend to dab away fake tears, Hiccup goes back to thinking about his schedule for the evening. He’s on stable duty tonight, so after he finishes there, he can triple-check their new security measures, and then head down to the beach. That gives him a good few hours before the sunrise patrol that he’s scheduled for himself.

“Hiccup,” Astrid says for the millionth time. “Your food’s getting cold.”

He shovels a few bites into his mouth, making a face at her. “Happy?”

“Not really, no.”

“Sorry, sorry.” Hiccup sighs, mouth still half-full. “Got a lot on my mind.”

“And on your face,” Snotlout adds, unhelpfully. “The food’s supposed to go in your mouth, dude.”

“Shut up, Snotlout,” Hiccup and Astrid say at the same time.

He finishes the rest of his miserably salty food without mishap, still concentrating on the secret plans in his head that no one else can see. He doesn't notice the way Astrid is staring at him, chin resting in her palm, like he's someone's excellent battle strategy that she's on her way to pick apart.

Stable duties take twice as long as he'd projected, so by the time he and Toothless stand side-by-side on the sand, he's itching to get this whole thing over with. If all goes well, he should be on his way to a successful *Get Hiccup Over His Very Sudden and Very Stupid New Fear of the Ocean* in no time.

Other than a few clouds, it's a fairly clear night. The wind has picked up slightly, which isn't the most ideal, but he can work with it.

He walks towards the place where the water meets the sand, listening to the rhythmic rush and retreat of the waves. He walks out to his ankles (singular, a voice in his head that sounds suspiciously like Tuff reminds him), to his knees (also sort of singular). The sand shifts beneath him, and his arms instantly go out to steady himself.

"Well, on with it, I suppose." He double-checks the fasteners on his prosthetic leg, just in case.

He's going in fully clothed. The added weight is an important (and stressful) addition, according to his tests in the basin. He should probably stretch this bit out, if he's being honest—introduce the clothes at a more gradual pace. But the Midnight Sun is right around the corner, and Berk will need the Riders back to help with the work period.

Gotta be at full-strength.

"I'm okay," he calls back to Toothless, who is pacing at the edge of the water, trying to follow him. "No, bud, you gotta stay there, remember?"

He tries to push himself further, but the moment the water rises towards his chest, his vision swims. He can feel the salt on his lips already, the way it burns—it's not from dinner, it's from the Straits. He's not going to make it out. There's nothing he can do.

Instead of wading forward, Hiccup is sloshing back through the shallows—tracking water and sand with him as he retreats.

Like a coward.

"Thor-dammnit all." Hiccup feels like throwing something. Or tearing out his own hair. He lets out a growl of anger that makes Toothless' ear flaps snap to their alert positioning. "We don't have time for this."

Adrenaline coursing through his body, Hiccup changes course.

He marches towards the cliffs jutting out over the deeper water instead, eyeing a ledge at least ten feet up. The Riders have used it as a sort of diving board plenty of times. If he can't walk his body into the ocean, he'll just have to throw it. There's a metaphor about jumping into the deep-end, right? He's done all the right things, been gentle and patient, and now it's time to just do the damn thing.

Toothless senses what's going on, trying to fly up to the ledge. Without his tail in an open position, he's grounded. He barks out several loud distress calls and doesn't stop when Hiccup motions for him to be quiet.

At the edge of the (really, pretty low) overhang, Hiccup doesn't give himself time to think. No more thinking. Just jumping. He skids at the edge, closes his eyes and pretends to be leaping onto the back of Toothless, and then he's falling.

The cold, sharp impact of the water takes his breath away.

The first thing he thinks is *wow, maybe this was a really stupid idea.*

The second thing he thinks is *shit, I think I've forgotten how to breathe.*

His whole body locks up, forgetting every subpar swim technique he's ever halfway mastered. Yeah, okay, this was a really stupid idea. He's going to drown out here for real. Seventh time's the charm.

A wave crashes over the top of him, and he goes under. A salty stream of water goes up his nose and into his mouth. He chokes, sucking in which does nothing but make it worse.

And then he's being yanked out of the water by a pair of arms. He feels himself lifted out of the water and draped onto a dragon's back: Stormfly's, definitely. It's not his most graceful moment, but he's shivering too badly to care.

"T-Toothless," Hiccup chatters, his teeth clacking horribly.

"We've got him." Astrid slides her hand beneath his leather belt, as if she's afraid he might try and jump off. Fair enough.

The team drags his sorry ass back to the Clubhouse, laying him out on the floor in front of the fire with a spare blanket. Toothless instantly charges towards him, shoving his snout relentlessly against Hiccup's face.

"Yeah," Hiccup says, still a bit breathless. "Good dragon. That's a good dragon."

"What were you *thinking?"* Astrid's got her angriest brow position going. "Are you crazy? I know you're not stupid, so you must just be crazy."

Hiccup palms his face. "No, no, I think I might be stupid."

"Fine. Stupid and crazy." She bears down on him. "Thank Odin Fishlegs noticed Toothless' distress signal, or you could've been done for. Start talking, Haddock."

He groans. “It’s really fine. I just miscalculated some stuff.”

“Were you testing another fucking Dragonfly?” Astrid has made it very clear how she feels about him jumping off cliffs.

“No, I wish.” Hiccup runs a hand through his hair, already starting to dry out and crust from the seawater. *“Fuck,* I really thought it would work.”

“What would work?” Astrid squats down in front of him, eyes boring into his skull. She’s not even blinking, really.

“It’s the water, isn’t it?” Snotlout is leaning against the wall of the clubhouse. His body language is deceptively disinterested. “That’s what you were doing with all those stupid buckets in your hut.”

“Not, not all water.” Hiccup’s face is burning. He’s never felt so stupid in his life. “Just the ocean. I mean, I’ve had plenty of close calls before, but this time—I mean, it did something to me. All I can think about is that diving bell. If you just let me go back out there, I think I can—”

“No.” Astrid deflates a little, sitting cross-legged in front of him. “Hiccup, why didn’t you tell us?”

He draws the blanket tighter around his shoulders, rocking forward.

“Hiccup?”

“What, Astrid?” he snaps. “What did you want me to say? *Hey, guys, remember when I almost saw Valhalla under the ocean? Seems like it’s still fucking me up—ha ha, whoops! Isn’t that so fun? Do you still trust me? Want me to lead you guys into battle?* Get real.”

She swats his shoulder. “Of course we still want you to lead us into battle, you muttonhead. Only Hiccup Haddock risks his life to save a dragon like that. So, go on, give us the *poor Hiccup* speech, throw yourself off another cliff, but it’s not changing any of our minds.”

He stares at the floor, picking at a splinter coming up from one of the wooden boards.

“You almost died.” Ruff comes and sits next to Astrid on the floor. “That sucked.”

“And you had your leg on you down there,” Tuff sighs. “So, I wouldn’t have even gotten to inherit the only good part of you biting the dust. Hmm, that phrase doesn’t really work for this situation. How about—biting the water? Biting the water, yes.”

“Very sage, Brother Nut.”

“Thank you, Sister Nut.”

“Reintroduction to a phobia-causing situation is a strong method of breaking through fear,” Fishlegs shrugs. “So, you’re on the right track. Just… maybe not to such an extreme.”

“Things take time.” Astrid twists her head to make eye contact with him, offering a tiny, wry smile. “I know you hate that, but it’s true.”

“I don’t have time.” Hiccup fumbles with his fingers to keep his voice from wavering. “None of us have time. Viggo __”

“—is not here right now.” Astrid gestures around the room. “Do you see him? Because I don’t.”

Everyone is quiet for a long time. It’s not uncomfortable, though. The fire crackles. Toothless purrs. Hiccup finds that the longer he sits there, the more exhausted his body is becoming. He fights a yawn, hiding his face in Toothless’ wing.

“You’re going to sleep,” Astrid says, voice much quieter now, but no less firm. “Snotlout, toss me a pillow.”

He throws it hard, but she snatches it out of the air easily. Snotlout gives her an impressed nod for a moment before clearing his throat and burying the expression.

Astrid presses it into Hiccup’s arms, motioning for him to lie down. “Forget about the sunrise patrol—I’ll do it. When you wake up, you’re going to meet us down at the beach. Got it?”

Hiccup studies her. “What are you planning?”

“That’s a question for Awake-Hiccup,” Astrid says. “You’re Asleep-Hiccup. Goodnight. Go to bed.”

And really, who is he to argue with that?

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When he wakes up on the Clubhouse floor, afternoon light is streaming into the place. The fire is embers now, and everyone else is gone. Only Toothless remains, chirping a raspy hello as Hiccup stirs.

“Hey.” Hiccup breathes deeply. “Guess we should see what Astrid wants at the beach, huh? What are the odds she just wants to hit us really hard with a bludgeon, you think?”

Toothless hums a noncommittal response.

Together, the two of them soar back down to water level, landing softly in the sand. He’s not sure what he’s expecting to see, but definitely not this:

His friends are in the water, playing, splashing, and just straight up lounging.

Snotlout is shirtless, a nice sunburn already starting to show on his freckled shoulders, and he lays across Hookfang's back. The twins are taking turns shouting random words at each other until one of their dragon heads dunks them into the water. It is extremely unclear what the rules of this game are to anyone else.

"Hiya, Hiccup," Fishlegs waves. "I'm teaching Meatlug to doggie paddle. Although, I suppose we could call it the Gronckle paddle in this circumstance, huh girl?"

Meatlug's tongue lolls out of her mouth as she bumps her head lovingly against Fishlegs.

"What is this?" Hiccup asks Astrid, who has walked out from the water to join him. Her hair—still braided—drips down her back. She's wearing only her chest wrap and underwear. He forces his eyes to stay trained firmly on her face and absolutely nowhere else. Certainly not the droplets of water running down her stomach and legs or the way her back arches as she stretches.

Astrid sweeps her arms wide. "Good ocean memories. Figured you could use some. Remind that tired body of yours that this can be a nice place, too."

He's not sure whether it will work, but the sheer thoughtfulness, the implication, creates a tightness in his throat that has nothing to do with drowning. He presses the rough heel of his palm to his eyes for half a second, swallowing hard.

Stripping off his leathers, he leaves them in the sand beside the giant pile of other discarded armor. The sun warms his skin to the touch almost immediately.

Astrid takes his hand, walking with him towards the water. He grips it tightly, stopping for just a second at the edge. She stops with him, waiting, and then they're wading into the ocean.

Snotlout whoops, splashing water in their direction.

"Good?" Astrid asks, still holding his hand as they start to lose the ability to touch the bottom. "I'm gonna drop your hand so you can tread."

He nods, waiting for the moment his instincts fail him again. It doesn't come. He can still feel his heart hammering, but his limbs are moving. The water is freezing, but in a sort of refreshing way.

"That's it," Astrid laughs. "There you go."

He sucks in air, trailing his fingers in the cold water—watching the patterns. A few small fish swirl around his legs. Toothless splashes in the shallows behind him, giving Hiccup one of his big grins.

Hiccup treads for a while, floating on his back when he tires.

"Gonna go under," he tells Astrid suddenly.

She doesn't question him, doesn't ask *are you sure?* and make a fuss. He signals to Toothless—hand pointing down—and then pushes under the surface.

The noise from above immediately dulls. Water swooshes quietly around his head, moving his hair. He opens his eyes, staring up. The salt burns, and it's blurry, but he can see the shadowed outline of his friends and their dragons above, haloed by the sunlight.

Hiccup stays down there for a long moment, listening to them laugh and shout, before pushing upwards. He breaks the surface, shooting up and spraying both Fishlegs and Astrid with the splash.

"Haddock, with the late shot," Snotlout calls. "Can anyone beat the size of that one?"

More laughter. More splashing.

Maybe a part of Hiccup will always be nervous around the ocean. Maybe he can't change that for good—can't go back to who he was before the Straits. But if this new version of him gets to keep experiencing things like this, he'll probably be okay.

Astrid jumps from Stormfly's back, curling her legs up and dousing everyone. She pops up, pumping a fist in the air with a triumphant cry.

"Cheating!"

"Stuff it, Jorgenson!"

"Technically, we didn't say she couldn't do that—"

"I fucking win, assholes. Again. Deal with it."

"Wait, what game are we playing?"

"Tuff forgot the rules we have to start over."

"Not on your lives!"

Yeah, Hiccup smiles. He'll be okay.

Notes:

these goddamn dragon riders, am i right? also, i realize that the weather is 99% buttass cold in this series, but i'm in the driver's seat, so whatever. warm swimming weather on this one afternoon because i said so.

i'm @cracklinhaze on tumblr where i am equally as normal. approach the edge of the enclosure. it'll be fun.

Close (#)